

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Women of Twilight-Plymouth, 3/3/52. Joseph Kipness and Jack Hylton present a new play by Sylvia Rayman with an all English cast headed by Betty Ann Davies and Mary Merrill. Anthony Hawtrey directed...Paris '90-Beeth, 3/4/52. Cornelia Otis Skinner's sole production of her French sketches, music and lyrics by Kay Smith, settings and lighting by Donald Oenslager.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on inside

Mrs. McThing-Martin Beck, 2/20/52. ANTA's second subscription play drew a mixed set of reviews from the weekly critics. Four "pres" and four "cens" were recorded. Trade paper reviewers Hobe, Variety, and Francis, Billboard, okayed proceedings for these adults who enjoyed make-believe. Direction by Joseph Buleff in production starring Helen Hayes was uneven, Variety critic noted. Francis tabbed Mary Chase script a fairy tale that makes sense, played as charmingly as it is written. Beth singled out seven year old Lydia Reed as a fine trouper, even outshining the performance of Brandon de Wilde. Newsweek man thought script might have been a second "Harvey" if author had treated her whimsies with a lighter touch, but present version is good enough. Gabriel, Cue, admired the profuse wit and almost profound absurdity of the show. Dissenters included critics of Time, New Yorker, New Leader and WCBS Bill Leonard. Time appraiser complained that stagecraft stumbled and shuffled, real laughs didn't begin in "comic fantasy" until second half. Gibbs, New Yorker, admitted he wasn't a "whimsy" man himself, and that 20 years on a magazine hostile to elfin prose may have prejudiced him against the play. He added that he cannot go along with his colleagues who claim in print they are really children at heart. Shipley, New Leader, fears the author went on a wild goose chase and brought back a dead duck. While Leonard does not think the author put her point across. Latter is yearning for a revival of Harvey.

Dear Barbarians-Royale, 2/21/52-2/23/52. A very mild set of "con" votes was sufficient to close down Lexford Richards first comedy, as produced by Gant Gaither after four performances. Most of daily reviewers admitted play left almost no impression on them. Cloris Leachman, Betsy von Furstenberg, Nicholas Joy, Violet Heming and Donald Murphy, in that order, received favorable mention. Several commented that Richards' first try contained a valid comic idea, but his script was too dull and matter of fact to be very interesting. Top praise was divided between outstanding set and curtain designed by Jack Landau and between act music provided by Cy Coleman's popular quartet. Atkinson, Times, thought the play would have been popular if produced as the senior class play in a dramatic school. Kerr, Herald Tribune, marked script off as trivial and tiresome. Coleman, Mirror, and Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, thought comedy picked up in final act, but not enough to save the evening. Several saw signs that some day Richards would turn out a good comedy.

Out of Town Reviews

New Haven debut of Flight into Egypt okayed by Bone, Variety, as good theatre, though not a great play. Sparkling dialogue and fine performances make up for familiar plot. Irene Selznick production of George Taber's play opens March 13th at Music Box...Plenty of work needed on The Long Watch, Tayler, Billboard, comments after Boston tryout. Authors Morrie Ryskind and Harvey Haislip will have to put much freshness in production before scheduled March 20th Lyceum opening...Potential winner is how Bone, Variety, rated new musical Three Wishes for Jamie at New Haven opening. Starring Anne Jeffreys and Bert Wheeler with book by Abe Burrows, due at Hellinger.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr.Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Merning Telegraph WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Telegram | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. L.I.Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32.

Nene: 10-14-21-26-27. So-So: 31.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50

Con: 19-22-26-28. None: 10-14-21-23. Se-So: 3.

THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51

Con: 3-25-30. None: 11-13-14-15-17-18-21-26-28-31-32.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51

Con: 2-6-15-16-22-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-26-28-29-32

GIGI-11/24/51

Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-25-27-28-32-33. None: 14-23-31.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

Con: 26. None: 10-21.

I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51

Con: 3-5-7-12-27-28. None: 10-13-14-18-21-26-31.

So-So: 1.

JANE-2/1/52

Con: 2-7-9-19-24-27-33. None: 5-10 thru 16-21-22-26-28

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24. -31-32

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32.

PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51

Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23-24. None: 14-18-27-28-31-32.

PAL JOEY-1/3/52

Con: 27. None: 13-14-17-28-31-32.

POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51

Con: 8-16-22-26-27-28-33. None: 7-11-14-21-23-31.

REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51

Con: 1-7-16-18-21-22-24-26-28-30-33. None: 12-13-17.

THE SHRIKE-1/15/52

Con: 8-16-22-26-27. None: 12-13-14-17-21-31-32.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

Con: 33. Se-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28.

STALAG 17-5/8/51

Con: 4-25-26-27-30. None: 10-21-22. So-So: 3.

TOP BANANA-11/1/51

Con: 6-7-27-30. None: 10-21-22. So-So: 3.

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-27-28-32.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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Shows that closed include Dear Barbarians...Mrs.McThing run extended, seats on sale to June...Curtain Going Up closed in Philadelphia for repairs...Actors Fund drive expects to net \$100,000...British bi-weekly "Theatre Newsletter" has changed its name to "Theatre"..."Shakespeare Newsletter" celebrating its first birthday...Two high school students from Siam saw The King and I, their talk with leads broadcast on Voice of America to Thailand..."Theatre Circle," headed by Uta Hagen, seeking superior scripts for production..."Players, Inc." to tour Japan and Far East armed forces bases for USO presenting The School for Wives and Twelfth Night...Veronica's Veil, Union City, New Jersey, passion play running for 38th season at St.Joseph's Auditorium, 1309 Central Avenue, Union City, nightly and on Saturday and Sunday afternoons through April...Chicago company of The Moon Is Blue to open Thursdays at 7:30 PM...Times reports that Martha Wright, South Pacific, hasn't missed a performance since her black French poodle, Suzie, gave birth to seven puppies a fortnight ago.

' Green Room Department '

UNFAIR ACTORS...Theatre history is full of instances where actors have thrown their critics into confusion by suddenly producing some new line of business or by pointing a phrase in an entirely unorthodox and untraditional manner, comments Basil Francis, Theatre. In the theatre, as well as in other arts, a breakaway from convention can be most salutary. Critics often want actors to give carbon copies of famed performances in a given role.

THEATRE IDEAS...Tickets should be advertised at their basic price plus 20 percent government tax, press agent Wolfe Kaufman suggests to News...Top flight touring companies and nation-wide public relations for the theatre are two factors that would aid the "Fabulous Invalid" Candida producer Thomas Hammond explained to Coleman, Mirror...See Shakespeare, Shaw, Ibsen and Fry first, then read the scripts recommends Chapman, News, to get the full flavor of the printed words.

7:00 PM SUCCESS...South Pacific Monday night 7:00 PM curtain is a success, Morehouse, WT&S, learned from the show's general manager. No complaints, no refunds, plus 90 percent of audience okaying the idea is how the record stands now. Ticket brokers are pessimistic. League of NY Theatres to discuss experiment at March 4th meeting.

COLUMN TIPS...Rumors that Cole Porter will cast his next musical in Hollywood has the Hansen drug store crowd hunting for train fare, reveals Kilgallen...Guys and Dolls Vivian Blaine working so hard that she recently fainted on stage though few in audience realized it, informs Wilson.

FUNS FUNS...Jose Ferrer won't put on two road companies of his new play, insists Phillips, WT&S, because he knows "three Shrikes are out."...Show titles to fit submitted by Sobol, Journal American, include: Rockefeller Center-Affairs of Skate...Elizabeth-Remains to be Queen...World Problem-Call Me Atom.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Mystery to Sylvester, News, why Lunt and Fontanne don't buy The Fourposter and hold it for their final, gala farewell tour...When Lydia Reed points her finger at Helen Hays in Mrs. McThing, Watts, Post, bets the latter isn't altogether acting when she looks frightened...Judith Anderson reportedly mad at critics who panned Come of Age notes Variety.

MAIL BOX...Part of the reason for high tickets, Kilgallen answers a reader, lies in the fact that producers who know they have a hit charge as much as the traffic will bear..."Mr. Theatre" title should be granted Jose Ferrer, suggests Times reader.

' Legit Stuff '

Theatre Guild press agent Joseph Heidt planning production of The Unclean, play dealing with Hiss-Chambers case...ANTA and National Theatre Conference awarded playwrighting grants to Joanna Roos, Helene Fraenkel and Walter Charles Roberts...United Scenic Artists listed Women of Twilight unfair for importing British scenery for play...Actors Equity seeking \$60 summer stock minimum...Stock Managers and Press Agents Union agree to hire union members for summer theatres when economically possible to do so...Brandt to close down "Subway Circuit"...Stage Managers Club hosted their first president William Ross at a cocktail party in ANTA lounge..."Drama Desk" membership open to reporters and editors who cover NYC theatre beat.

' Meet the Critic - Joseph Wood Krutch '

Two to four times as many theatre fans would go to the theatre if tickets were easier to obtain, Joseph Wood Krutch told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. "Nation" critic is sure the problem has a solution if managers continually ask if there isn't some way for the public to buy tickets more easily. Though major advance operations are needed before attending the theatre, a person can drop into a motion picture theatre at any time, he pointed out.

New York's daily critics do a sound job, Krutch commented, but they don't have the glamor they did in the flamboyant days of Welcott, Breun, Hammond and others. Answer probably lies in fact that the profession itself is not surrounded with glamor he added. Daily critics serve an important purpose in recommending plays. Krutch thinks even more important is fact that the New York dailies assign drama staffs to cover the theatre, thus reminding their readers that theatre is an important element in New York community life.

Because "Nation" readers are located throughout the country, Krutch sees his primary function as critic to write something interesting in itself, that will inform the reader even if he never gets to New York to see the particular play under discussion. But in spite of this he still gives a "pro" and "con" on each and every exhibit. Krutch has been the "Nation" critic since 1924, except for a three year absence. During that period he served on the editorial board of the weekly, and for a time was its editor. Like most critics he literally stumbled into the profession. Krutch's first editorial job on "Nation" was as a book reviewer. When the drama critic, Ludwig Lewisohn, went abroad he was assigned to the theatre. First show he covered was What Price Glory.

"Desert Year" Krutch's newest book on his recent visit in Arizona is being published this week. Recently he has turned out very popular biographies of Poe, Thoreau and Johnson, in addition to several books of essays. Krutch also is the author of several textbooks on the drama. Currently he is Brander Mathews, Professor of Dramatic Art at Columbia University, where he has been teaching dramatic literature since 1937. A graduate of the University of Tennessee, Krutch obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. at Columbia. In 1940 he was president of the NY Drama Critics Circle. Variety records that at a Circle meeting some joker sent in a box containing a snake, which Krutch promptly took home and released in his garden.

On the controversial subject of TV and theatre, "Nation" reviewer doesn't see how TV can possibly aid in building theatre fans. A basic appeal of TV, he stated, is the ease in which it can be turned on, not the program content.

' Palace Two A Day '

Second two a day vaudeville program at Palace won approval, with slight reservations, of daily critics. Lauritz Melchior, Ben Blue, Jean Carroll, Les Compagnons de la Chanson, Chandra Kaly, Lee de Lyen, Wells and The Four Fays, and Jan Miner complete the eight act program. Funke, Times, billed it as a well rounded affair, though Melchior does not have to apologize for trying to fellow Judy Garland. Pihodna, Herald Tribune, admitted he could sit for hours listening to the French singers. Rice, Post, okayed all but de Lyen. McClain, Journal American, didn't think bill came anywhere near the Garland show, but it was all fine except for Blue and Miner. Hawkins, WT&S, liked it all but Blue's sometimes over-elaborated act.

